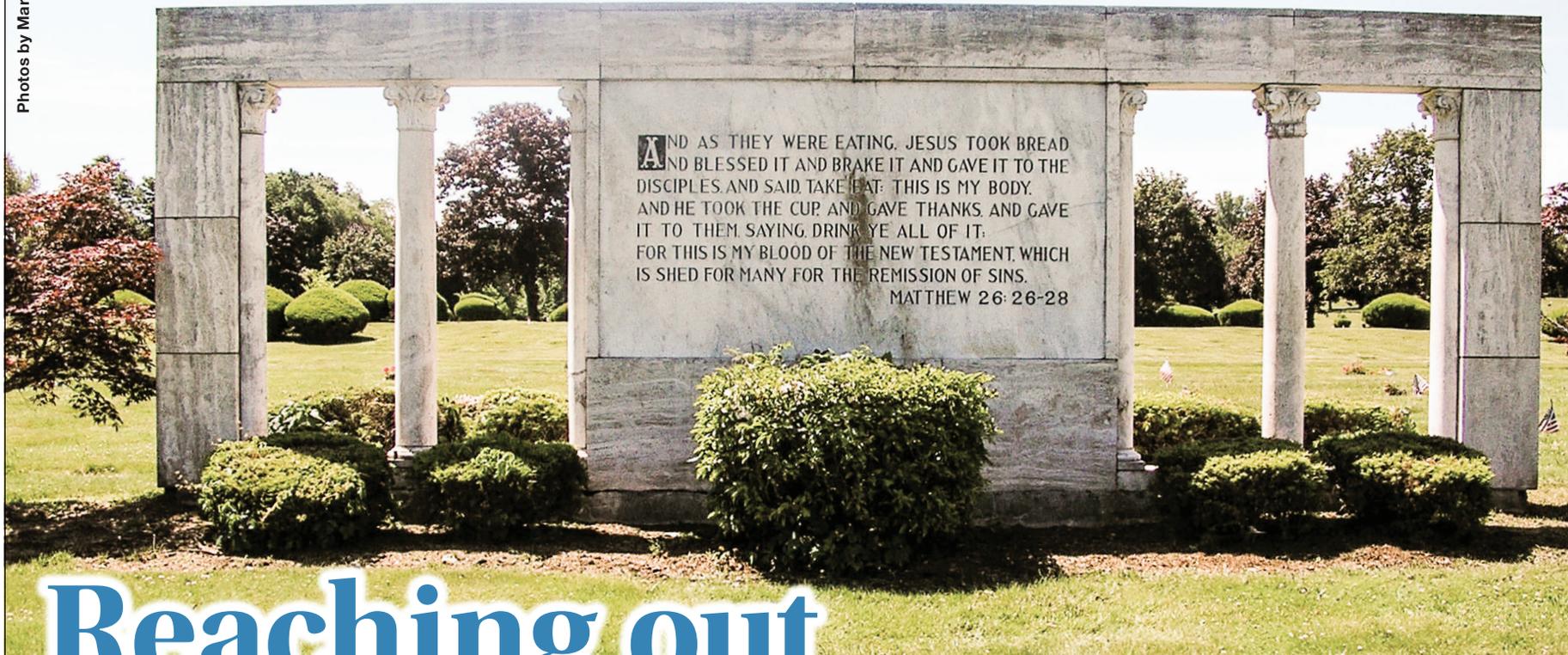


A marble sculpture recalling The Last Supper is one of several monuments in the cemetery.



Reaching out

Rose Hill Memorial Park seeks more community involvement

by Mark Jahne
Editor

Rose Hill Memorial Park is the largest cemetery in Connecticut. But serving as a final resting place for those whose lives have ended is not its only role.

Its top executive considers the land an integrated part of the town and not merely a burial ground and hopes people will see its wider value as part of the Rocky Hill community.

That's one of many reasons why Rose Hill brought in several actors to portray the lives of its late residents over the Memorial Day weekend. A few of those people were famous, but it was also a chance to bring back to life normal folks who still had interesting lives and stories to tell.

More than 40,000 souls rest in peace in Rose Hill's bucolic setting off Elm Street. Maria Libro is the chief executive officer.

"My dad is the accountant for Rose Hill and I'm a CPA (certified public accountant). I work for his

practice" in addition to running the cemetery and its affiliated businesses, she said.

"We developed a ton of different ideas" to better serve the families of those who are interred at Rose Hill as well as to give the place a greater public image, she added.

Librio said Cedar Hill Cemetery in Hartford is full of famous people and occasionally offers guided tours based around those celebrities. Rose Hill may not have as many famous folks, but her thinking was that everyone has a story, so why not share some of them?

She sees families come to visit the graves of their loved ones every day. It made her realize that "everybody's important." The most visits tend to occur on Memorial Day weekend so that's why she decided to do the reenactment event at that time.

"Let's bring [some of these] people back to life. Three of these people served our country," she said. "It's another way to give back to the community. At least a cou-

ple thousand people come through that weekend."

Thomas Fritsch is one of the few people who have two separate markers in the cemetery. He died in 1967 fighting the Vietnam War and was originally remembered with a plaque along its Pathway of Heroes.

When his physical remains were discovered 37 years after his death, they were brought home and buried in a plot elsewhere on the grounds. He was portrayed as a teenager by actor Patrick Jensen.

Patrick played Fritsch at age 13, a junior high school pupil looking forward to the rest of his life. He was a Boy Scout and wanted to join the military when he came of age.

He also wanted to become a volunteer firefighter in his hometown of Portland. Fritsch was killed in combat May 10, 1968, and originally reported as missing in action. His remains were recovered from Vietnam and positively identified and they were brought home for burial Aug. 13, 2005.

Jen Jensen donned an apron

and kneaded a handful of dough while bringing the late Christine Volpe back to life during the Memorial Day re-enactment. Volpe died in 2009.

"It sounded like something really fun to do," she said. "How do you make somebody on paper become three dimensional?"

Like most of the other re-enactors she has acting experience with West Hartford Community Theater. Her children Patrick and Jessica portrayed other Rose Hill people.

"I've been doing community theater all my life," Jensen said.

Christine Volpe wasn't famous but the idea behind the re-enactment was that every person has value. She was born in Italy and married a mason.

Volpe was clearly a devoted mother and wife and spent a lot of time making sure everyone around her was well fed. She was a religious woman who worshiped at St. Francis of Assisi Church and enjoyed playing Frank Sinatra music for her three children.